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The war on hospital ships

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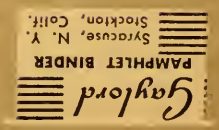
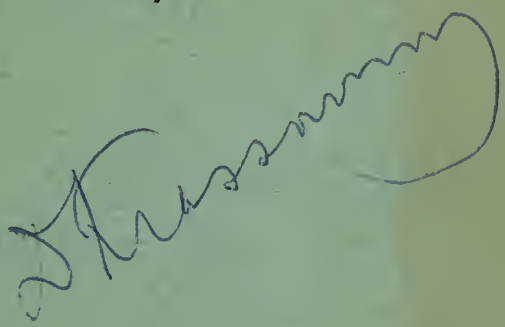


THE
WAR ON HOSPITAL SHIPS

From

the Narratives of Eye-witnesses.



T. FISHER UNWIN, Ltd.,
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PRICE TWOPENCE.

Britain's Financial Burden.

SOME people seem to think that because Britain is a land of enormous wealth the British people are not making any real financial sacrifice in the war. It is not easy to indicate the extent of Britain's contribution to the economic resources of the Allies, because the figures are so large as to be almost beyond the reach of comprehension or imagination. When Mr. Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer, moved his last vote of credit for 500 millions sterling on May 9, 1917, the daily expenditure of the United Kingdom stood at £7,450,000. The total expenditure during the entire period of the war down to April 1, 1917, was 4,318 million pounds, of which unimaginable sum 1,137 millions had been provided out of revenue as distinct from loans. During the last financial year no less than £574,428,000 was raised in revenue—that is, a sum over 374 millions greater than the pre-war revenue at its highest figure. It is highly satisfactory that 26 per cent. of England's entire wartime expenditure should have been met out of revenue or taxation. During the two years and eight months of the war ending April 1, 1917, England financed her Allies and Dominions, but chiefly her Allies, to the extent of about 1,000 million pounds sterling.

But these figures, as I said, are too large to convey any distinct idea to the ordinary mind. We want to know how this colossal expenditure affects the individual, how, for example, the man with a modest income is affected by these huge figures of expenditure and taxation. It is calculated that the war is costing each person—man, woman and child—in the United Kingdom 3*s.* per day, of which 2*s.* 3*d.* is being borrowed, leaving 9*d.* to be raised by taxation. In order to illustrate this figure it should be mentioned that the average individual consumption of goods and services in England amounts, or amounted before the war, to about 2*s.* 4*d.* per day. Or, in other words, the taxation due to the war imposes on an average upon every person in the United Kingdom a contribution in taxation equal to about one-third of his entire expenditure before the war.

Let us see for a moment how these new millions of revenue are raised. Income tax, which was about 9*d.* or 1*s.* before the war, is now 2*s.* 3*d.* up to £500 a year, 2*s.* 6*d.* between £500 and £1,000, and 5*s.* over £2,500. That is for earned incomes. Unearned incomes reach the maximum of 5*s.* at an income exceeding £2,000. In addition, there is what is known as the super-tax, which begins on incomes over £3,000. The ordinary citizen is not fortunate enough to be affected by these higher grades of taxation. It may be interesting, however, to indicate approximately what a person with, say, £21,000 per annum has to pay. In income tax and super-tax he is charged, on present war rates, £7,954 3*s.* 4*d.* But this, of course, is not nearly his entire contribution to the revenue. There is the whole range of indirect taxation and the numerous additional channels through which the country is made to contribute to the sinews of war.

The incidence of the income tax has been lowered during the war to a figure of £131 a year, so that many of the working classes are now

paying this impost. To take a specimen case or two, a man with no children, earning 55*s.* per week, will pay income tax to the extent of a little more than 12*s.* a quarter. A man, with no children, earning £3 per week, pays 19*s.* quarterly. The reduction in the assessment allowed on each child would, of course, reduce such incomes below the minimum of income tax payment.

But direct taxation accounts for less than a half of the tax revenue of the State. Since the war, great increases have been made in indirect taxation. England, being a free trade country, lays her import duties on a narrow range of commodities not produced within her own shores, though she has added to the list a few manufactured goods, such as motor cars and musical instruments, during the war. The tax on cocoa has been raised from 1*d.* to 6*d.* per pound, on coffee and chicory from under 3*d.* to 6*d.*; the price of sugar, the supply of which has been taken over by the Government, has risen to a figure undreamed of before the war. Owing to the enormously increased taxation the cost of tobacco is now 100 per cent. higher than before the war. Hitherto it had been considered as heterodox to tax matches as to tax window space, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1916 imposed a tax of 4*d.* a thousand on these indispensable articles. Another big sum is being raised by what is called the amusement tax. A twopenny seat in a picture theatre pays a tax of a halfpenny; a ten-and-sixpenny seat in a theatre or concert pays one shilling. Theatres, football matches, horse races—all such entertainments bring grist to the national mill.

The tax collector waylays the citizen at many other points. For instance, railway travelling was rather heavily taxed during 1916, and since the beginning of 1917 railway charges have been increased by 50 per cent. The object of this, however, is not to make money, but to discourage all needless public travelling. One need only mention increased duties on mineral waters and motor cars, high duties on tea and tobacco, and higher postage and telegraph charges.

How does all this affect the person with, say, £500 a year? Income tax will account for an additional charge on that sum of over £22, but such a person is chiefly hit by the enormous rise in general prices due to taxation, increased freight charges and the general influence of war conditions. This rise of at least 50 per cent. in cost of living, due directly to the war, means a sacrifice of about £150 on an income of £500. For, it must be remembered, everything has obeyed the upward tendency in price, from newspapers to doctors' and dentists' fees. Insurance, fire premiums, and the like have risen owing to the higher cost of building materials.

It is quite a mistake, then, to imagine that the Englishman is not feeling the war or making any personal sacrifice. Even the game of war-profiteering has been severely handicapped. The excess profits tax—that is, the tax on profits higher than a pre-war average—was raised in 1917 to 80 per cent., which means that, taking income tax, super-tax and excess profits tax together, the profiteer will be handing back to the State well over 90 per cent. of his war profits. It will be seen, therefore, that Britain is contributing not only an enormous naval and military strength to the Allied cause, but is mobilising her money-power effectually for the same great purpose. *J. SAXON MILLS.*

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THE WAR ON HOSPITAL SHIPS.

On March 17th, 1916, the Russian hospital ship "Portugal"* was lying off Rizeh, on the Turkish coast of the Black Sea. She was on her way from Batoum to Ofi with a string of flat-bottomed boats in tow, destined for the conveyance of wounded from the shore to the ship. One of these boats had become water-logged, and was being pumped clear while the "Portugal" lay to. The "Portugal" carried no wounded at the moment, but the Red Cross Staff was on board and the full crew. The weather was clear.

Suddenly the look-out man saw a periscope approaching the vessel, but the ship's officers explained to all hands that they were immune from attack. When the "Portugal" had first been commissioned for Red Cross work—she belonged to the *Messageries Maritimes*, and still kept her French officers and crew—the Russian Government had notified the Turkish and Bulgarian Governments of the fact, and had obtained from them a recognition of her status. In the clear weather her distinguishing marks could not be unobserved. The only thing now necessary, the Captain and the Mate explained, was to keep calm, and to take no precautionary measures which might arouse the submarine commander's suspicion.

The submarine approached the "Portugal" quietly

* See the report of the Russian Special Commission of Inquiry under the presidency of Senator Alexis Krivtsov.

and discharged a torpedo, which missed its aim. Then it circled round and discharged a second at the other side of the vessel, from some 30 or 40 feet away. This second torpedo struck the "Portugal" amidships, in the engine-room. There was a violent explosion; the hull broke in two, and most of those on board were precipitated into the whirlpool between the two halves; with a still more violent explosion the boilers blew up, and the bow and stern fragments of the "Portugal" went down simultaneously.

Forty-five of the Red Cross staff were lost, twenty-one of whom were nurses; twenty-one men were lost out of the Russian crew, and nineteen out of the French. Thus eighty-five of those on board perished altogether.

Here is an account of the outrage by one of the survivors—Nikolai Nikolaevitch Sabaev, secretary to the Russian Red Cross Society's Third Ambulance Detachment with the Army of the Caucasus:—

> "At about 8 o'clock in the morning, somebody on board shouted out, 'submarine boat.' At first, this news did not produce any panic; on the contrary, everybody rushed on deck to be the first to see the submarine. It never entered anybody's head to suppose that a submarine would attack a hospital-ship, sailing under the flag of the Red Cross. I went on to the upper deck, and noticed the periscope of a submarine, moving parallel with the steamer at a distance of about 170 or 200 feet. Having reached a point opposite to the middle of the 'Portugal,' the periscope disappeared for a short time, then reappeared, and the submarine discharged a torpedo. I descended from the upper deck, and ran to the stern, with the intention of jumping into the sea. When, however, I noticed that most of the people on deck had life-belts, I ran into saloon No. 5, seized a life-belt, and put it on, but then I fell down, as the

'Portugal' was sinking at the place where she was broken in two, while her stem and stern were going up higher all the time. All round me unfortunate sisters of mercy were screaming for help. They fell down, like myself, and some of them fainted. The deck became more down-sloping every minute, and I rolled off into the water between the two halves of the sinking steamer. I was drawn down deep into the whirlpool, and began to be whirled round and thrown about in every direction. While under the water, I heard a dull, rumbling noise, which was evidently the bursting of the boilers, for it threw me out of the vortex about a sazhen, or 7 feet, away from the engulfment of the wreck. The stem and stern of the steamer had gone up until they were almost at right angles with the water, and the divided steamer was settling down. At this moment I was again sucked under, but I exerted myself afresh, and once more rose to the surface. I then saw both portions of the 'Portugal' go down rapidly, and disappear beneath the flood. A terrible commotion of the water ensued, and I was dragged under, together with the 'Portugal.' I felt that I was going down deep, and for the first time I realised that I was drowning. With the swiftness of lightning, all my past life flitted through my brain. I remembered my relatives, and it seemed as if I could see their grief and tears at the news of my death. My strength failed me, but I kept my mouth firmly shut, and tried not to take in the water. I knew that the moment of death from heart failure was near. It so happened, however, that the disturbance of the water somewhat abated, and I succeeded in swimming up again. I glanced round. The 'Portugal' was no more. Nothing but broken pieces of wreck, boxes which had contained our medicaments, materials for dressing wounds, and provisions were floating about. Everywhere I could see the heads and arms of people battling with the waves, and their shrieks for help were frightful. It is impossible to describe the horrors of that scene, and the remembrance of it will remain with me for the rest of my life. 8 or 9 sazhens (56 or 63 feet) away from where I was, I saw a life-saving raft, and I swam towards it. Although my soddened clothes greatly impeded my movements, I nevertheless reached the raft, and was

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taken on to it. About 20 persons were on it already, exclusively men. Amongst them was the French Mate, who assisted the Captain of the 'Portugal,' and he and I at once set about making a rudder out of two of the oars which were on the raft, and we placed an oarsman on each side of it. We had been going about 8 minutes when we saw the body of a woman floating motionless, and dressed in the garb of a sister of mercy. I ordered the oarsmen to row towards her, but they said it was only a corpse, and we should do better to save some of the people who were still keeping themselves alive on the surface of the water. I seized hold of an oar, and as the woman floated nearer, I caught her with it, and dragged her towards us. I pulled her out of the water as far as her waist, and listened to her heart, which I found was still beating, though very slowly. We then raised her on to the raft. She was unconscious, quite blue, and with only feeble signs of life. We began to rub her, and bring her to her senses. She at last opened her eyes and enquired where she was. I told her that she was saved. Soon, however, she turned pale, said she was dying, and gave me the address of her relatives, to inform them of her death. She began to spit blood, and was delirious, but gradually a better feeling returned, and she was soon out of danger. We went on rowing towards the shore for a considerable time, as we did not wish to accept offers to go on board the motor launch and trawler, and we asked the men in those two craft to hurry up to the scene of the wreck, and save those who were perhaps still surviving. As a matter of fact the motor boat saved several other persons. At last a launch, towing a boat full of the rescued, took us also in tow, and we reached the shore in safety. The hospital ship 'Portugal' was painted white, with a red border all round. The funnels were white with red crosses, and a Red Cross flag was on the mast. These distinguishing signs were plainly visible, and there can be no doubt whatever that they could be perfectly well seen by the men in the submarine. The conduct of the submarine itself proves that the men in it knew that they had to do with a hospital ship. The fact of the submarine having moved so slowly, shows that the enemy was conscious of being quite out of danger."

The sinking of the "Portugal" was apparently a casual atrocity, but when the German Government embarked on the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare in January 1917, they determined to sink hospital ships systematically in their "blockaded zone." It was quite a logical decision, for the object of the submarine campaign is to reduce, by every means, the total tonnage of the world. If the world will not accept Germany's conditions, Germany will make the civilised order of the world impossible. That is Germany's challenge, and every hospital ship sunk brings her a step further towards making it good, for the hospital ship that has been destroyed must be replaced by another ship, which might otherwise have carried timber or grain.

Only, it is not Germany's way to confess her motives, transparent though they generally are, and her purpose to sink hospital ships was therefore announced to the world in the following terms:—

> "The German Government can no longer suffer that the British Government should forward troops and munitions to the main theatre of war under cover of the Red Cross, and it therefore declares that from now on no enemy hospital ship will be allowed in the sea zone comprised between a line drawn from Flamborough Head to Terschelling on the one hand and Ushant and Land's End on the other. If in this sea zone after the expiry of the stated time any enemy hospital ship is encountered, it will be considered as a vessel of war, and it will be attacked without further ceremony."

Already in 1916 the German Press had seized occasions for spreading this slander. When, for example, the British hospital ship "Britannic" was sunk in the Ægean with 1,100 wounded on board, and about fifty lives were lost, it was at first considered doubtful whether the cause

was a torpedo or a mine. But an inspired statement at once appeared in the German *Kieler Zeitung* to the effect that the "Britannic" had been torpedoed.

"The Britannic," the statement declared, "was transporting fresh troops for our enemies. If she had not been doing so, our submarines would never, of course, have torpedoed her."

This statement was answered by an announcement from the British Admiralty on December 3rd, 1916:—

"German wireless messages to the Embassy, Washington, are again promulgating mendacious reports, purporting to come from Rotterdam, that the hospital ship 'Britannic,' recently sunk, had troops on board.

"A complete statement of all persons carried on board that ship was published on November 24th.

"As has been officially stated on several previous occasions, British hospital ships are employed *solely* in the conditions set forth in the Geneva and Hague Conventions, and they carry neither *personnel* nor material other than that authorised by those Conventions."

The threat against hospital ships contained in the subsequent declaration of unrestricted submarine war was answered by the British Foreign Office on January 31st, 1917:—

"The German Government announce that they have conclusive proof that in several instances enemy hospital ships have often been misused for the transport of munitions and troops. They also state that they have placed these proofs through diplomatic channels before the British and French Governments, and have at the same time declared that the traffic of hospital ships on the military routes for the forces fighting in France and Belgium within a line drawn between Flamborough Head and Terschelling on the one hand, and from Ushant to Land's End on the other, will no longer be tolerated.

"His Majesty's Government have received no such communication, through diplomatic channels or otherwise, from the German Government as is alleged, and they most emphatically deny that British hospital ships have been used for the transport of munitions and troops, or in any way contrary to the Hague Convention for the adaptation of the principles of the Geneva Convention to maritime war.

"Under the Convention belligerents have the right to search hospital ships, and the German Government have therefore an obvious remedy in case of suspicion, a remedy which they have never utilised.

"From the German Government's statement that hospital ships will no longer be tolerated within the limits mentioned only one conclusion can be drawn, namely, that it is the intention of the German Government to add yet another and more unspeakable crime against law and humanity to the long list which disgraces their record.

"In these circumstances, His Majesty's Government have requested the United States Government to inform the German Government that His Majesty's Government have decided that if the threat is carried out reprisals will immediately be taken by the British authorities concerned."

Since then Germany has proceeded from threats to deeds.

The hospital ship "Asturias," which had been attacked unsuccessfully by a German submarine as early as Feb. 1st, 1915, was torpedoed and sunk on the night of March 20th–21st, 1917, with all her crew and staff on board. The outrage was announced by the British Admiralty a week later:—

"The British hospital ship 'Asturias,' whilst steaming with all navigating lights and with all the proper distinguishing Red Cross signs brilliantly illuminated, was torpedoed without warning on the night March 20-21.

"The following casualties occurred :—

Medical Services :—	Crew :—
Dead, 11.	Dead 20.
Missing, 3 (including. 1 female staff nurse).	Missing, 9 (including 1 stewardess).
Injured, 17.	Injured, 22.

"The torpedoing of this hospital ship is included in the list of achievements claimed by U-boats as reported in the German Wireless Press message yesterday."

This announcement was followed by another on April 14th, making public the sinking of the hospital ships "Saita" and "Gloucester Castle" :—

"The British hospital ship 'Gloucester Castle' was torpedoed without warning in mid-Channel during the night of the 30th-31st March. All the wounded were successfully removed from the ship.

"The Berlin Official Wireless of April 11 proclaims the fact that she was torpedoed by a U-boat, thus removing any possible doubt in the matter.

"On the 10th instant the British hospital ship 'Saita' struck a mine in the Channel during very bad weather and sank. There were no wounded on board, but it is regretted that the following casualties occurred :—

R.A.M.C. Complement	Medical Officers	5
	Nursing Sisters	9
	R.A.M.C. *Personnel*	38

all of whom are missing and presumed drowned.

"All the next-of-kin have been informed."

Then, on April 17th, the "Donegal" and "Lanfranc" were sunk, and in a longer statement the Admiralty announced the news and summed up the situation :—

"On the evening of April 17 the SS. 'Donegal' and 'Lanfranc,' while transporting wounded to British ports, were torpedoed without warning.

"Owing to the German practice of sinking hospital ships at sight, and to the fact that distinctive marking and lighting of such vessels render them more conspicuous targets for

German submarines, it has become no longer possible to distinguish our hospital ships in the customary manner. One of these two ships, therefore, though carrying wounded, was not in any way outwardly distinguished as a hospital ship. Both were provided with an escort for protection.

"The 'Donegal' carried slightly wounded cases, all British. Of these, twenty-nine men, as well as twelve of the crew, are missing and presumed drowned.

"The 'Lanfranc,' in addition to 234 wounded British officers and men, carried 167 wounded German prisoners, a medical *personnel* of fifty-two and a crew of 123.

"Of these the following are missing, and presumed drowned:—

2 wounded British officers.
11 wounded British other ranks.
1 R.A.M.C. staff.
5 crew.
2 wounded German officers.
13 wounded German other ranks.

"152 wounded German prisoners were rescued by British patrol vessels at the imminent risk of being themselves torpedoed.

"The next-of-kin are being informed in all cases of loss of life.

"The illegal and inhuman submarine warfare which Germany has waged upon merchant shipping has for some time been openly adopted against hospital ships flying the Red Cross flag and otherwise acting in complete conformity with the requirements of the Hague Convention. This culmination of savagery has brought the world face to face with a situation that is without parallel in civilised warfare. It has no justification in any conceivable distortion of international law, nor in the most brutal creed of necessity. The British Government, in considering fully the measures to be adopted in these circumstances, has had in review the entire facts on which the German Government claims to have acted. These may be recapitulated in brief for the consideration of the civilised world.

"On Jan. 29, 1917, the German Government addressed a memorial to the American and Spanish Embassies for

transmission to the British and French Governments. In this it was stated that the hospital ships of the Allies, and of Britain in particular, were employed for the purpose of transporting troops and military supplies. The evidence of a number of witnesses, the majority of whom were anonymous and the remainder German, was cited in support of this outrageous statement. The German Government, in conclusion, declared that no hospital ship would be 'tolerated' in the tract of sea lying between lines connecting Flamborough Head and Terschelling on the one side, and Ushant and Land's End on the other.

"The substance of this memorial was embodied in an official German wireless message, and on the evening of Jan. 31 the British Foreign Office issued a statement to the effect that, although no communication had been received through the customary channels alleging the misuse of British hospital ships, they most emphatically denied that such ships had been used in any way contrary to the Hague Convention. It was pointed out that under this Convention Germany had an obvious remedy in cases of suspicion—the right to visit and to search any hospital ships encountered on the high seas. From the refusal of the German Government to tolerate the hospital ships within certain limits only one conclusion could be drawn, 'namely, that it is the intention of the German Government to add yet other and more unspeakable crimes to the long list that disgraces their record.' The Government of the United States was requested to inform the German Government that if the threat were carried out immediate reprisals would follow.

"The course dictated by humanity and common-sense was plain, and needed no reminder such as was given by the British Government. Yet, in spite of their emphatic denials of the German falsehoods and the subsequent warning conveyed, the British hospital ship 'Asturias' was torpedoed without warning on the night of March 20. The ship was steaming with all navigation lights burning and the proper Red Cross sign brilliantly illuminated. The cumulative evidence that she had been torpedoed and not mined was only accepted after it had been confirmed beyond all doubt and after exhaustive investigation. The loss of life

on this occasion included a nursing sister and a stewardess, a fact which might have brought home to any enemy but Germany some sense of the enormity of the outrage.

"But the nation responsible for the murder of Nurse Cavell appears to have accepted the intelligence with composure, if not with satisfaction. The German official wireless message of the 26th finally established the guilt of the German Government, who, having boasted of the deed, published on the 29th a further message which said: 'It would, moreover, be remarkable that the English in the case of the "Asturias" should have abstained from their customary procedure of using hospital ships for the transport of troops and munitions.'

"On the night of March 30-31 the hospital ship 'Gloucester Castle' met with a similar fate. On this occasion the Berlin official wireless message again cynically published a notification that she was torpedoed by a U-boat, thus removing any possible doubt in the matter.

"The British Government thereupon authorised prompt measures of reprisal in accordance with the announcement already referred to, and on April 14 a large squadron of British and French aeroplanes bombarded the German town of Freiburg with satisfactory results.

"In spite of the warnings conveyed to Germany that her barbarous attacks on hospital ships would result in such action on the part of Great Britain, the German Government published through the wireless message of April 16 an abusive protest, which 'categorically contested any justification' for this reprisal. Nothing could afford a better illustration of German mentality and reasoning. On the other hand, the spirit in which the Allies exacted retribution is shown by the purely military character of the measures adopted. The airmen who carried out the attack were exposed to and did, in fact, incur precisely the same dangers from the town defences as they would have been exposed to in the course of an ordinary action.

"It was plain, however, that any retaliatory measures open to a Government upholding the principles of humanity and justice would not prove a deterrent to Germany in the future. Such reprisals could be only punitive in effect, and it

was necessary to reconsider the entire status of hospital ships in the light of the attitude taken by the German Government. The markings agreed upon at The Hague Convention, which had hitherto guaranteed the immunity of hospital ships from attack, rendered them no longer inviolable. The custom of showing all navigating lights and illuminating the distinctive markings at night, only afforded a better target for German submarines. It was therefore decided that sick and wounded, together with medical *personnel* and supplies, must in future be transported for their own safety in ships carrying no distinctive markings and proceeding without lights, in the same manner as ordinary mercantile traffic. Notice has accordingly been given to the German Government that the British Government have withdrawn certain vessels from the list of hospital ships published by them in accordance with international law, and they will no longer appear thereon.

"During the recent fighting on the Western Front a very large number of wounded German prisoners have fallen into our hands. These officers and men have to be transported to England for treatment by the same means that our own wounded are brought over, and practically all ships transporting wounded are bound to carry a proportion of German wounded. These will naturally share with British wounded equal risks from the attacks of German submarines. Whether the policy of the German Government is likely to be deflected from its abominable course by the knowledge that it can only be pursued at the expense of their own wounded, remains to be seen.

"In conclusion, it may be recalled that although Germany did not frame any formal allegation of the misuse of hospital ships against the Allies until the commencement of 1917, the British hospital ship 'Asturias' was fired at and missed by a German submarine on Feb. 1, 1915, in broad daylight, while flying the Red Cross flag. In the light of recent events it seems reasonable to suppose that the hospital ships 'Braemar Castle' and 'Britannic' were also torpedoed in Nov. 1916, although the evidence at the time was not considered conclusive as to whether their losses were occasioned by mines or torpedo."

The torpedoing of the "Lanfranc" is thus described by a British officer on board * :—

"The 'Lanfranc' was attacked by a submarine about 7.30 on Tuesday evening, just as we had finished dinner. A few of us were strolling to and fro on the deck, when there was a crash, which shook the liner violently. This was followed by an explosion, and glass and splinters of wood flew in all directions. I had a narrow escape from being pitched overboard, and only regained my feet with difficulty. In a few minutes the engines had stopped, and the 'Lanfranc' appeared to be sinking rapidly, but to our surprise she steadied herself and, after a while, remained perfectly motionless. We had on board nearly 200 prisoners belonging to the Prussian Guard and about twice as many British wounded, among the latter being some very bad cases. The moment the torpedo struck the 'Lanfranc' the Prussians made a mad rush for the lifeboats. One of their officers came up to a boat close to which I was standing. I shouted to him to go back, whereupon he stood and scowled. 'You must save us,' he begged. I told him to wait his turn. Other Prussians showed their cowardice by dropping on their knees and imploring pity. Some of them cried 'Kamerad,' as they do on the battlefield. I allowed none of them to pass me.

"Meanwhile the crew and the staff had gone to their posts. The stretcher cases were brought on deck as quickly as possible, and the first boats were lowered without delay. Help had been summoned, and many vessels were hurrying to our assistance. In these moments, while wounded Tommies—many of them as helpless as little children—lay in their cots unaided, the Prussian moral dropped to zero. Our cowardly prisoners made another crazy effort to get into a lifeboat. They managed to crowd into one, but no sooner had it been lowered than it toppled over. The Prussians were thrown into the water, and they fought with each other in order to reach another boat containing a number of gravely wounded British soldiers.

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* *Daily Telegraph*, April 23, 1917.

"The behaviour of our own lads I shall never forget. Crippled as many of them were, they tried to stand at attention while the more serious cases were being looked after. And those who could lend a hand scurried below to help in saving friend or enemy. I have never seen so many individual illustrations of genuine chivalry and comradeship. One man I saw had had a leg severed, and his head was heavily bandaged. He was lifting himself up a staircase by the hands, and was just as keen on summoning help for Fritz as on saving himself. He whistled to a mate to come and aid a Prussian who was unable to move owing to internal injuries. Another Tommy limped painfully along with a Prussian officer on his arm and helped the latter to a boat. It is impossible to give adequate praise to the crew and staff. They were all heroes. They remained at their posts until the last man had been taken off, and some of them took off articles of their clothing and threw them into the lifeboats for the benefit of those who were in need of warm covering. The same spirit manifested itself as we moved away from the scene of the outrage. I saw a sergeant take his tunic off and make a pillow of it for a wounded German. There was a private who had his arms round an enemy trying hard to make the best of an uncomfortable resting-place.

"In the midst of all this tragedy the element of comedy was not wanting. A cockney lad struck up a ditty, and the boat's company joined in the chorus of 'All dressed up and nowhere to go.' Then we had 'Take me back to Blighty,' and as a French vessel came along to our rescue the boys sang 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag.' The French displayed unforgettable hospitality. As soon as they took our wounded on board they improvised beds and stripped themselves almost bare so that English and German alike might be comfortable. Hot refreshments were provided and cigarettes distributed, and as the ship headed for an English port our fellows, with great gusto, joined in the chorus of 'When we've wound up the Watch on the Rhine.'"

But it was all tragedy for those whose duty it was to receive the survivors on shore, and the following account

shows the extremity of human suffering which Germany's calculated policy entails * :—

"One-thirty o'clock on a belated winter's morning. Colder and more wretched than it had been at midnight. The waters of the harbour were being whipped to frenzy in the darkness by a viciously driving sleety rain. A good time enough for those in warm beds, but no sort of a night for seafaring, or for lying out on the plains of Picardy, say, trying to get shelter out of a water-logged, shrap-sprayed shell crater. Suddenly the line of watchers at the quay head, their coats all gleaming, jumped into life and animation, for from around the end of the long jetty appeared a mast-head light. 'Here they are, at last! How cold and wet they'll be.'

"A second light followed the first, and, handled as though they were rubber-tyred perambulators on a foot-path, two of His Majesty's destroyers were laid gently alongside the stage, their sides just kissing the great rope fenders. The whole operation had been performed in perfect silence; but in that dramatic instant of soundless contact with the wharfside fenders, a full-throated shout rent the rain-swept air from the deck of the first destroyer: 'Three cheers for the "Hummingbird" and the "Whipsnake"!'

"For a full minute the thunder of cheering rolled out into the night; a very moving sound, compact of vivid and varied emotions, and contributed to by men who a day or two earlier had been fighting under the scream of our own and enemy shells, and forcing their way through knee-deep mud and tangles of German barbed wire in the inferno between Vimy Ridge and Arras. There they had been wounded, and passed out for rest and treatment in Blighty. But since then, all unarmed and helpless, they had been suddenly called on to face the Boche again, and in his vilest and most murderous guise. Yes, the sum of the cheering was moving, its component parts singularly varied. For a full minute the cheering rose and fell athwart the driving rain, and then the 'Hummingbird' made answer with one

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* *Daily Telegraph*, April 24, 1917.

long fierce blast from her siren ; full of defiance, and somehow, as it seemed to our ears, of good British cheer.

" Then they began to come ashore ; a long, stiffly-moving file of shaky, utterly weary souls, wrapped about as to their heads or arms, necks or shoulders, with rain and brine-soaked surgical bandages. Few had had any sleep for several nights ; all were new-plucked from the midmost jaws of death among the shell-holes ; and—all had faced the Boche again, at his ugliest, since leaving France. The fatigue in their eyes, which no man may hide in such a case, was pathetic, but there was a look in the same eyes that overrode anything like pathos ; the look indomitable. Some of the greyness began to fade from out their faces now, as, warmed and cheered and comforted, they climbed into the waiting train, filling coach after coach, an endless succession. As they sank into their seats, one heard short, hard sighs of relief pass their tight-closed lips. But for talk, there was mighty little of that, and might have been none, if one had put no questions.

" ' Yes, we were within sight of Blighty when the torpedo got us '—it was a long, lean, North-countryman who spoke—' but it just caught our stern, and blew it clean away—a few men with it too. Another 4 secs. and that would have been a wasted torpedo.' An exceptionally small, earnest-faced man in the corner looked up. ' Yes,' he said, quickly and quietly ; ' and I suppose a few Boches might have been saved for a bit from earning—hell ! '

" ' Eh ? Well, I don't know about that,' resumed the North-countryman, in an open-minded, matter-of-fact way, as if he regarded this as a question for the decision of some superior officer, possibly his commanding officer. ' But it was wonderful to see the two destroyers. They are men, those sailors. They had their boats in the water almost before you could turn round. One of them came close in alongside of us, and the other went circling round and round us, like a sheep dog, but angry. Man, but that destroyer did look angry. We floated just over a quarter of an hour, and we were very nearly all clear of her, when she gave one h'ist, and went down like a plummet. That last few minutes wasn't nice, you know—like waiting to go over the

parapet. Some of us jumped to the deck of the destroyer, and some got knocked about a bit ; wounded men, ye see ; not so handy as they might be other times. The destroyer came right in under us at last, to get the last of us, and only drew away as the suction began. There wasn't any muddle or panic, you know ; no more'n on a job o' work at the front. I don't suppose we minded as much as civvies would. The Army does teach you how to keep your head ; and, anyhow, we'd been getting it in the neck this long time from shells, and Emma Gees, an' bombs, an' that. This was only a sort of a last act. If it came out there, you'd think nothing of it ; but on the way here I suppose a man begins to lay off a bit, as ye might say, an' get a bit slacker.'

" A handful of lint is given to one man with a bandaged arm and a nasty cut on his forehead, which was still bleeding. ' I only just found out I had that,' he said. ' I did feel a bit of a bump there when I was getting down the side, but forgot it after. Of course, we could see she was done for, and everybody kept quiet. It was lucky the rain was so heavy, they say, because it beat the sea down a bit, and made it smoother. It was perishing cold ; but I'm feeling fine now. I got twenty-eight Boches to me own rifle, out there by Blangy, and I wish it had been a hundred. We picked 'em off as they ran, like rabbits. Between us here, I reckon we must have got a regiment of 'em, so no wonder they wanted to get us to-night. It seems a dirty way to do it, with a hospital ship. But there—you know what the Boches are. A chap on the destroyer—they're men, those destroyer chaps, all right—he told me a thing or two about what happened to these U-boats, and it sounded pretty good, I can tell you. I suppose the Boches can't help being Boches—the silly blighters ! '

" One went the length of the long train. The silent calm of it all seemed almost unnatural ; fatigue of body and mind. The whole thing was accepted as part of the day's work ; and, after all, ' We're in Blighty, you know, an' don't you forget it,' said one man. ' It's rather like something you've seen in " the pictures," ' said another. As the train pulled slowly, smoothly out from the stage, the rescued men offered up their thanks again, the only way they knew, with

a long, quivering cheer. 'Are you down-hearted?' called an orderly. With a long, rumbling roar of a 'No,' they disappeared into the night, and—England.

"'Nice chap, Fritz,' said a destroyer officer, as he turned away."

The epilogue is given by a worker in a Y.M.C.A. hut:—

"We have had a most stirring and exciting day. We got down to the Hut this morning to find that part of the crew and some of the wounded soldiers rescued from a torpedoed hospital ship had been brought into the dock. They were sent into us to wait for the ambulances. The ship, H.M. Hospital Ship 'Lanfranc,' was struck at 8 o'clock last evening. Some French fishing smacks dashed to the rescue and brought them in about 8 o'clock this morning. Many of the men were only half dressed, and all were cold and hungry. We made a great horseshoe of our tables round the stove, and got them all a hot breakfast.

"Three of them were so badly wounded that they had to be laid on tables. It was awful to see men with their bandages torn off their wounded limbs, and the stories they told bring home to one most forcibly what a shipwreck of wounded soldiers must be like. Some of the crew seemed all right, but after a while I suppose the shock began to tell, and they looked too dreadful for words. They were all so nice and so brave, for some were clearly in a great deal of pain.

"One of those rescued was the officer's mess-room page, a mere child of about 15. We were told that there were 242 British soldiers, only two of which were walking cases, and 130 Germans; 35 of these were officers. Two R.A.M.C. men were lost, and, it is feared, some of the crew.

"Some of the less badly wounded Germans stampeded and jumped into a boat, partly filled with their own wounded. This they swamped, and the only person saved in it was an English boy, brought into us with a crushed hand and leg. He was caught by a chain down the ship's side, but it held him until he could be removed.

"After the dockers had left, and we had got all straight and tidy, some of the wounded went to the piano and began to sing—they are wonderful! It made us feel queer to hear

them sing 'Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag,' &c.

"After a little while Miss Waldegrave went to them and said that she felt they ought to give thanks for being safe—would they join in a hymn? Every man came to the piano, except one who was too bad to move (the worse cases had been taken away). They sang most wonderfully, 'O God, our help in ages past.' Then Miss Waldegrave said a short prayer, and before she could move away one of the men said, 'Might they have "for those in peril on the sea" for their mates, as they did not know where they might be?'

"I have never heard anything like it. Many broke down. In the middle the cars came to take them away. They finished the hymn and then said good-bye. They gripped our hands until it was painful. Many of them ran back two or three times and said, 'Thank you, thank you; we shall never forget this morning.' We shall certainly never forget them, and the stories they told. One of those rescued had neither arms nor legs; another, who had lost both hands and both feet, managed to get on deck unaided!"

The verdict passed on these German outrages by the civilised world is expressed in a note which the International Red Cross Committee at Geneva—a body of the highest standing and most scrupulous impartiality—addressed to the German Government on the subject of its manifesto of January 29th, 1917, and the acts by which it was followed up:—

"The International Committee, whose right and duty it is to enforce respect for the principles of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention by reporting violations of them, draws the very serious attention of the German Government to the responsibility which it would assume towards the civilised world by persisting in a resolution which is in contradiction to the humanitarian conventions which it has pledged itself solemnly to respect.

"In torpedoing hospital ships it is not attacking combatants but defenceless beings, wounded or mutilated in war, and women who are devoting themselves to the

work of relief and charity. Every hospital ship is provided with the external signs prescribed by international conventions, the use of which has been regularly notified to belligerents, and should be respected by belligerents. The latter may, according to The Hague Convention, exercise the right of search, but have in no case any right to sink a ship and expose to death the hospital staff and the wounded.

"The 'Asturias' appears to have been torpedoed without any care having been taken to ascertain her character or her destination.

"Even if the correctness of the facts were admitted upon which Germany bases justification of her order, the International Committee considers that nothing can excuse the torpedoing of a hospital ship, and expresses the hope that such an order, contrary to international conventions, will cease to be carried out."

This note, from the greatest humanitarian society to the most ruthless military power in the world, is a protest without precedent against an unprecedented crime.

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